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**JOE CORRIE'S *IN TIME O' STRIFE*,
THE GENERAL STRIKE OF 1926, AND THE
IMPASSE OF INSURGENT MASCULINITY**

Paul Malgrati

With over a million and a half participants, the 1926 General Strike was—and remains—the largest industrial conflict in British social history. For nine days, from the 3rd to the 12th of May 1926, union banners and crowds of protesters filled the streets of Birmingham, Liverpool, London, and Glasgow. This action was initiated by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in support of British miners, fighting to preserve their wages after years of pay reductions. According to many radical activists, thinkers, and writers, including the Scottish socialist poet Hugh MacDiarmid, Britain stood on the edge of revolution:

I saw a rose come loupin' oot
Frae a camsteerie plant.
O wha'd ha'e thocht yon puir stock had
Sic an inhabitant?¹

At last, for MacDiarmid, labour's roses blossomed in the coalfields.

Yet in hindsight, most historians agree that this nine-day solidarity strike “was not a revolutionary situation.”² Unlike fiery, avantgarde poets, the TUC had no interest in fomenting insurrection. Instead, it summoned its striking members to refrain from any action that might take the movement from the unions' control. In most places, walk-outs and demonstrations followed a strict, orderly line of conduct.³ Whilst this cautious strategy angered radical organisations, including the young Communist Party of Great Britain and the Soviet-led Comintern, the TUC's leadership remained overall undisputed, even as unions ended the

¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, “Ballad of the General Strike,” in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, ed. Kenneth Buthlay (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2008), 139, ll.1119-1122.

² Dougal McNeill and Charles Ferrall, eds, *Writing the 1926 General Strike. Literature, Culture, Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5.

³ Julian Symons, *The General Strike* (orig. pub. 1957; repr. Looe: House of Stratus, 2014), 40-41; Keith Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 40, 70-72.

strike, on the 12th of May, without winning any concessions from mine owners.⁴

This moderate course of action, however, did not prevent sporadic outbursts of violence. Riots erupted in Plymouth, Liverpool, Edinburgh, and Glasgow whilst troops, reinforced by thousands of special policemen, were dispatched to pacify the coalfields where countless fights broke out between strikers and strike-breakers (Symons, 100-106). Keith Laybourn records “hundreds if not thousands of minor incidents which provoked jostling, the beating up of ‘blacklegs’ [strike-breakers] and the like”—though only few proved life-threatening (Laybourn, 71). In other words, the national, conciliatory strategy of the TUC contrasted with the experience of many working-class communities, at a local level, where the fever for insurrection did occasionally spread.

A similar escalation to riot shapes the dramatic structure of Joe Corrie's *In Time o' Strife*—the most significant working-class play written about the General Strike.⁵ Corrie (1894-1968), a proletarian writer who had served as a miner until 1921 before becoming a journalist for the left-leaning Miners' Reform Union, witnessed the strike first-hand in his West-Fife, mining town of Cardenden. His three-act play, set in 1926, in the fictional mining community of Carhill, portrays the hardships of two families of Scottish strikers—the Smiths and the Pettigrews. Prey to starvation and disillusion, abandoned by their union, Corrie's characters are faced with two desperate solutions: on the one hand, breaking the strike (“blacklegging”) to feed their families, or, on the other, attempting direct action to bring a swift, violent end to the conflict. This psychological conflict, tearing Carhill's menfolk apart, climaxes in the end of the second act when an angry crowd confronts the police and assaults the “blackleg” Wull Baxter (Jenny Smith's suitor). However, the consequences of insurrection prove dire for the community: the strike leader, Tam Anderson (Kate Pettigrew's lover) is imprisoned whilst Jock Smith, Tam Pettigrew, and the rest of Carhill miners are forced to return to work, famished and heartbroken.

Corrie's play offers an unusual depiction of strike and seditious actions in the context of 1920s, proletarian, and socialist literature. Instead of

⁴ Gabriel Gorodetsky, “The Soviet Union and Britain's General Strike of May 1926,” *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, 17: 2/3 (Apr-Sept 1976): 287-310; McNeill and Ferrall, 5.

⁵ Quotations and in-text references in this essay are to what is now the most accessible version: Joe Corrie, *In Time o' Strife*, adapted by Graham McLaren (London, Bloomsbury, 2013). McLaren added to the original text (Glasgow: Forward, 1928, etc.) from Corrie's songs and other writings, but his influential edition retains the structure and dialogue relied on for this argument.

emphasising the strike's economic and political roots, as seen elsewhere in agitprop theatre, *In Time o' Strife* stresses the more atavistic motives lying behind the picket line—including the miners' wish to prove their virility through dangerous, insurgent deeds.⁶ More than socialism, masculine honour appears as the deeper cause of Corrie's strikers. Their defeat, as a result, becomes the sign of a failure for Carhill's manhood—a bitter end heightened by the silent sacrifice and sufferings of the village's women. This masculine impasse reveals one of the messages of Corrie's play, calling for a substitution of the miners' braggart, male chauvinistic ethos with a softer, mixed-gender kind of class solidarity.

Yet before reaching such a conclusion, we must return to the context of Corrie's play. Unlike many working-class writers of his generation, who, according to Dougal McNeill and Charles Ferrall, tried to access "the wider world of publishing and reading" by "finding ways out to the whole social formation, beyond their own craft or region," Corrie wrote *In Time o' Strife*, in the last few months of 1926, for his own Fife-based, proletarian drama group, The Bowhill Players, formed the same year to raise money for strikers around Scottish coalfields.⁷ This dedication to a local, working-class audience, combined with Corrie's lack of interest in courting middle-class theatre critics—or even a national left-wing readership—might explain the unromantic, down-to-earth, and sobering qualities of his play.

Certainly, Corrie's working-class context and reception distinguishes his work from other famous, left-leaning Scottish writers who also invoked the 1926 dispute. Whilst Hugh MacDiarmid's convoluted metaphors in "Ballad of the General Strike" (1926), and Robert Colquhoun's radical theology in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Cloud Howe* (1933) uphold the strike and mourn Britain's aborted revolution in highly abstract and quasi-apocalyptic terms, Corrie, on the other hand, places the miners' fight in its prosaic, day-to-day, and ravenous context.⁸ The miner playwright refuses to idealise industrial action for a public of outsiders. Instead, he invites his fellow, strike-tested workers to become the spectators of their own

⁶ On agit-prop theatre, see for instance Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl, and Stuart Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left, 1880-1935: Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1985).

⁷ McNeill and Ferrall, 5, and see also, under "Biography," on "Joe Corrie (1894-1968): Miner Poet, Scottish Playwright, Radical Activist" (University of St Andrews Library, 2019) [online] <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/joe-corrie/biography/> [accessed 29 January 2020].

⁸ On MacDiarmid's and Grassic Gibbon's treatment of the General Strike, see "The General Strike and Scottish Modernism," in McNeill and Ferrall, 121-141.

struggle, dispelling defeat and hard feelings through catharsis and comic relief.

For this reason, external motivations for striking and rioting are hardly mentioned in Corrie's play. The characters in *In Time o' Strife* are not ideologues; their actions are not rationalised in abstract phrases which could be dissociated from their concrete, class-based experience. Even Marxist concepts ring hollow in Corrie's snappy, laconic dialogues. This is comically illustrated by Bob Smith's character—a young miner, teenage son of Jock and Jean Smith, and laughingstock of the play. By contrast with members of his family, who occasionally refer to “Bolshies” and “Socialists” but never engage with their ideas, Bob indulges in a militant kind of jargon. Most of his lines are punctuated by repetitive calls for “revolution,” “direct action,” and “the dictatorship o’ the proletariat.” Yet, as Malcolm Petrie argues, Bob, while

perhaps the most overtly political character in the play, appears more as comic relief than as a serious activist. Certainly, we are never given reason to believe that his grasp of Communist theory extends beyond his rather limited range of slogans.⁹

Bob speaks like a communist hard man, but his braggart declarations, whose artificial language jars with the vernacular candour of his family, fail to mask his juvenile anxiety.

Prepossessing adolescent with a lonely heart, Bob exalts political violence as a proof of manliness. This becomes evident, in the second act, when the teenager is reprimanded by his mother, Jean, for trying to join the riot against Wull Baxter:

Bob By gee, there's gaun to be some fun when that worm Baxter comes up the pit; a' the women o' the place are getting ready for him. There're no' half wild because there's nae Pairish money the day. And the polis are comin' in their hunners.

Jean You'll keep awa' frae it.

Bob You surely think it! I'm gaun to be in at the death.

Jean You're keepin' awa' frae it, I'm sayin'—and leavin' it to the men.

Bob Leave it to the *men*! What am I?

Jean A mug.

.....

Bob I'm wantin' a lend o' that poker.

Jean What for?

Bob A man's nae guid wi his bare fists against a policeman wi' a baton.

⁹ Malcolm Petrie, “Popular Politics and the Left: The Political Context of *In Time o' Strife*,” online at: <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/joe-corrie/conferencepapers/the-political-context-of-joe-corries-in-time-o-strife/> [accessed on 29th January 2020].

Jean Your faither'll be gaun, and that's plenty oot o' the yin hoose. I dinna want two o' ye to get the jile.

Bob The jile! Will we get the jile?

Jean Certainly you will.

Bob I didna ken that. Will I get another piece?

Jean You'll get your tea at teatime.

Bob By gee! When this strike's finished I bet ye I'll have yin solid tighther, I'll no' be able to eat onything for a week efter it. What about tuppence for a packet o' Woodbines?

Jean I dinna ha'e tuppence; you're smokin' ower much onyway.

Bob (*going out*) I ken what's needed, it's a revolution that's needed (46-48).

Here, Bob appears an object of ridicule—an immature glutton, hoping to impress Carhill's womenfolk by fighting the police at poker point, though ignoring the dangerous consequences of his action.

Bob is not the only character whose personal and political conduct is guided by masculine insecurity. His clumsy behaviour is but an immature reflection of the internal strife affecting all the male characters in the play. Far from ethereal political ideas, it is the anxiety to behave and appear as honourable men, ready to defend their families, communities, and class, which directs the miners' action and even leads them to contemplate the possibility of insurrection. Corrie's strikers are neither abstract theoreticians nor socialist positive heroes; they are frail, fallible men, pressurised by a community and an economic model regulated by ruthless gender norms.

The masculine stance expected from Carhill's striking menfolk is made explicit, between the end of Act One and the beginning of Act Two, when Tam Anderson organises a secret meeting to "form pickets" against "blacklegs" and prepare to "tear doon" (29) the parish council if it fails to deliver payments. Unlike Bob Smith, Tam Anderson is not an insecure, phrase-dropping boaster. Rather the opposite, Tam is a charismatic leader of men, respected amongst villagers, well-loved by his fiancée, Kate Pettigrew, and ready to "get the jile" for his revolutionary acts. His speech, during the meeting, justifies direct revolutionary action, not in political terms, but in the language of manliness:

Fellow workers ... are ye gaun to stand and see your wives and bairns starve to death before your e'en? Are you content to dae this and ca' yourself men? Fellow workers! We have been far ower meek in the past, the time has come when we've got to be prepared to let them see that we're prepared to die... (32)

Tam rallies his fellow workmen by appealing to their pride as breadwinners. In a mining world, where women are banned from entering the pit, Tam reminds his comrades of their responsibility to cater for their families. Since blacklegging is regarded as a dishonourable act of treason,

the only gallant deed remains to win the strike by every means necessary. According to Tam, this manly burden could not be borne by women: political action is the preserve of those already enfranchised by work.

This patriarchal approach to strike and insurrection is also enforced by Corrie's female characters. As already explained by Jean in her scene with Bob, rioting should be left "to the men." Similarly, in the first act, Kate Pettigrew sermonises Jock Smith (Jean's husband), who has become disillusioned with the strike:

Jock (*drinks and returns to chair*) No, this strike! strike! strike!
Idea'll no' dae.

Kate But it couldna be helped.

Jock Hoo could it no' be helped?

Kate Weel, the maister wanted to reduce your wages and make
you work langer 'oors, what else could you dae but strike?

Jock We could have knuckled doon.

Kate But you're a Scotsman, Jock.

Jock I am, and prood o' it.

Kate It doesna say much for Scotland. (14)

Like Bob's Bolshevik bravado and Tam's rallying fervour, Kate's debate with Jock swiftly departs from rational, economic arguments to focus on issues of masculine honour—this time mingled with patriotic *élan*. Kate merges Scotland's martial myth with the ethos of working-class resistance, stirring the pride of the Fife miner, whose economic responsibility and political duty is to protect his family whilst fighting in solidarity with his fellow workmen.

Kate's argument ("But you're a Scotsman, Jock") enforces the gender division of industrial action. Certainly, women participate in the struggle; miners' wives and daughters play a major role in keeping the children fed, encouraging men, and queuing for long hours at the parish council to receive relief fund. Yet at this stage in the play, it seems unthinkable that a strike could be won without the men's withdrawing their labour from the pit and using their physical force in the political arena.

The argument strikes home. A few moments later, Wull Baxter comes round, confessing his intention to go back to work, and asking Jock to join him in rallying the strikebreakers. Appalled and humiliated by such a proposition, Jock pulls himself together and chases Wull from his home. "I came oot [the pit] like a man and I'll go back like a man" (27), Jock cries in a fury, before leaving his house to attend Tam Anderson's meeting. The following day, at the beginning of the second act, Jock seems transformed; he appears fully committed to Tam's seditious plan, ready to "shed [his] blood" and "mairch to London and blaw Parliament in the air" (p.34). For Jock, the path to masculine redemption must cross through insurrection.

But Jock's dreams of macho heroism will soon evaporate. As rioters begin to gather in the streets of Carhill, Jock learns that Agnes Pettigrew,

his neighbour, has just died of starvation. The shocking news leaves Jock petrified. In a fit of despair, he refuses to rally Bob and Tam for the demonstration:

Bob That's Wull Baxter up the pit, an he's comin' hame
between twa regiments o' polis!

Jock Are there mony women there?

Bob Hunners, did you no hear them booin'?

Jock Could they not stay in their hooses an leave it to the men?

Bob Leave it to the men! That's mair fecht in twa women than
there is in a hunner men.

The booing is heard again.

Listen! Are you comin' to see the fun?

Jock I ha'e mair to think aboot.

Bob You're feart to get the jile, I'm no.

*He runs out. Jock peers through the window. The sound of disorder
gets louder. There is one loud 'Boo!' then Jenny bursts in.*

Jenny Oh faither, there's a riot started doon the street!

Jock I kent it would happen. Could thae blasted women no' kept
to their hooses onyway. (*Draws aside curtains of window*) (54-
55).

In this scene, Jock's despondency is heightened by the news of women's taking to the street. The riot, which he thought an opportunity to prove his gallant, class-warring manliness, has turned into a mixed-gender brawl where women are performing a violent, political role, encroaching on the space of patriarchal honour. Dismayed, Jock decides to shut himself at home. Yet as he rushes to lock the door, Wull Baxter suddenly bursts in, begging for shelter. Whilst outraged at the sight of the "traitor", Jock fails once more to act honourably, leaving his daughter, Jenny, with the upsetting task of chasing her ex-lover away.

Certainly, Jock is by no means the only miner humiliated by this turn of event. All male characters, following the riot, find themselves dishonoured, ashamed, or defeated in some manner. Wull Baxter is ostracised, rejected by Jenny as a "traitor" (75), and condemned to emigrate on his own to Canada. Tam Pettigrew (Agnes's husband), whose individualistic mindset failed his starving wife, drowns his sorrows in alcohol. Bob Smith, who cannot rise above ridicule, abases himself in obnoxious, braggart declarations, hurting the rest of his family. Finally, Tam Anderson, the charismatic leader arrested during the riot, is crushed under the boot of repression, sentenced to three years of imprisonment (far longer than expected), and forced to abandon his fiancée, Kate Pettigrew, in a state of desolation.

By contrast with the vainglory of Carhill's men, Corrie's female characters appear as the true, tragic heroines of the play. Indeed, not only did women support their families, brothers, and husbands throughout the

strike, not only did they turn out *en masse* during the riot when none of the men expected them, but they also bore the bitterest cost of the entire dispute. Whilst Agnes Pettigrew died a starved martyr, Kate Pettigrew finds herself forlorn—a “puir lass” (64)—, and Jenny Smith renounces her dreams of emigrating to Canada with Wull Baxter. As explained by the latter in the first act of the play, “Ye ken, it’s the women o’ this place that’s keepin’ this strike gaun on” (26.). By the end of the final act, the resilience of Carhill’s women appears as their community’s only strength.

Upon hearing Jock relate the news of Tam’s trial, Jean declares:

Jean Ach! You men dinna ken hoo to strike onywey; you throw doon your tools, come oot the pit, and stand at the street corner till you starve yoursel’s back to the pit again. And when you *dae* go back, instead o’ strikin’ oot for mair on your rate, you fill mair hutches, and would cut each ither’s throat to get them.

Jock I ken there’s a good when o’ thae kind.

Jean You’re yin o’ thae kind yoursel’. And you’re grousin’ aboot the langer ‘oors you’ll need to work, but you’ll be awa’ to the pit an ‘oor before the time, and be an ‘oor later in comin’ hame frae it. Ach! you dinna ken the first thing about strikin’, for as often as you’ve been on strike.

Jock D’ye want us to blaw the pits in the air, or what?

Jean If you’d slip oot the road and play cricket, and leave it to the women, you’d *dae* mair guid.

Jock You ha’e plenty o’ gab, if that would win a strike. I was at yin women’s meetin’, and I couldna hear a word for a weel efter it, gab-gab-gab!

Jean We ha’e mair than gab, we ha’e courage, and that’s what you men dinna ha’e. (59)

Unlike Jock, who can only think of violent insurrection (“blawing the pits in the air”) as an alternative mode of action, Jean, praising the heroism of Carhill’s women, demands the end of gender divisions in the labour movement. Her tirade, which would have resounded in the context of 1926, two years before the full enfranchisement of British women, draws crucial lessons from the General Strike. The miners’ real failure, according to Jean, did not lie in their incapacity to act as *men*, at least not in a patriarchal, chauvinistic, and competitive sense. Instead, Jean explains that miners failed because they refused to allow more space for women in their struggle. Had they listened to their wives and daughters, Carhill’s men would have learnt that the true courage of solidarity is not found in short-lived, harmful days of action (“standin’ at the street corner”) but in daily abnegation and sacrifices, away from the egotistic competition for money and honours.

Jean’s comments are not lost on Jock. A few moments later, the Smiths receive a visit from Tam Pettigrew, their widowed neighbour. Tam is heavily inebriated. Distressed by the death of his wife, he has spent the

entire day at the pub, leaving his daughter Kate on her own. Tam's state infuriates Jock, who urges his friend to sit down and sober up:

Jock SIT DOON!

Tam *sits, afraid, and much sobered.*

Jock A fine sicht you to cheer the he'rts o' your bairns, a lot o' hert'nin' a drunk faither'll gi'e them. See here, Tam. This conduct'll no dae; you've got to pull yoursel' thegither; be a man, it's only cowards that droon their sorrows in the pub. Ha'e some respect for the wife you laid to rest.

There is a pause.

Tam Jock, my he'rt's broken.

He buries his head in his hands.

Jock Yours is no' the only he'rt that's broken, there's a housefu' doon by. And Kate's needin' a' the help you can gi'e her, or there's gaun to be another death in the hoose.

Tam I'll never get the better o' this, Jock... Died o' starvation... Them and their strike... they've killed her.

.....

Jock You'll never get ower it if you're gaun to booze. You ha'e your bairns to care for noo. *You've* got to take the mither's place, and you'll need to get ower for their sakes. D'ye think the wife would rest in her grave if she kent o' this cairry on the day? (.71)

To "be a man," Tam has "got to take the mither's place." Just as women overstepped gender boundaries during the riot, Tam must now understand that his redemption depends on his relinquishing masculine exceptionalism and patriarchal entitlement.

Jock's critical approach to masculinity becomes even more evident, shortly after Tam's departure, when Bob begins to castigate his drunken neighbour:

Bob The booze is just a flamin' curse.

Jock It's a pity for him [Tam] tae, Bob.

Bob It's *nae* pity for him, he's a washoot. May I choke mysel' stane deid the first time I put that stuff in my mooth.

Jock It's easy speakin', but we're no' a' made o' steel. You're young yet, Bob and you ha'e a lot to come through before you can say what you can dae. (p.72)

Whilst Bob's juvenile harshness and inexperience with alcohol leads him to despise Tam, Jock pleads for more compassion and better understanding. "We're no' a' made o' steel"—this sentence carried a specific significance, in mid-1920s Britain (and Europe), at a time when many left-wing organisations developed a soldierly, ironclad, and steely-eyed image of the working-class—and of working men in particular.¹⁰ By

¹⁰ On left-wing representations of workers, in Britain and Europe, during the interwar period, see e.g. "Warriors and Socialists," in George Mosse, *The Image of*

contrast with Bob's readiness to disparage a friend and quasi-Stalinist fierceness (*Stalin* meaning "man of steel" in Russian), Jock, who has striven for honourable manhood during most of the play, finally acknowledges weakness, kind-heartedness, and so-called "feminine" qualities as part of a wiser ideal of masculinity.

Jock's realisation, at the end of the play, appears a source of hope for the future. Whilst miners lost the strike, they have learnt the cost of their own chauvinistic bravado. The last words of the play, as Carhill's men, united in defeat, return to the pit singing "The Red Flag," are left to Jean Smith:

That's the spirit, my he'rties! Sing! Sing! Tho' they ha'e ye chained to the wheels and the darkness. Sing! Tho' they ha'e ye crushed in the mire. Keep up your he'rts, my laddies, you'll win through yet, for there's nae power on earth can crush the men that can sing on a day like this. (.77).

This final choir, supplanting violence and divisions with the power of harmony, exhilarates Jean, the long-standing advocate of caring, non-gendered solidarity.

This last, hopeful note resonates with Corrie's poetic aspiration for a gentler pace of life and tenderer human relations. Corrie, who had been forced to leave the mine, ill and exhausted, at the age of 27, was described by the communist hard man John MacArthur as "not too strong physically," and he often portrayed mining life as a long-suffering purgatory that condemned human relations to hardships and harshness.¹¹ An admirer of Robert Burns, Corrie could not identify with a fierce, violent, male political vanguard, whose thick-skinned brutality mirrored the hellishness of its pit-bound condition.¹² Eschewing insurgent masculinity, Corrie embraced instead a softer pastoral utopia, where nature, leisure, and kindness would soothe the wounds of workers.

Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), 107-132; Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body. Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Paul Malgrati, "Red City, Brown City, City of Men: Radical Activism and Man-up Politics in Interwar Saint-Denis," *Histoire@Politiques: Revue électronique de Centre d'histoire du Sciences Po*, 35 (May-August 2018), at: https://www.histoire-politique.fr/documents/35/autresArticles/pdf/HP35_Varia_Paul_Malgrati_def.pdf [accessed on 2 February 2020].

¹¹ Ian MacDougall, ed., *Militant miners: recollections of John McArthur, Buckhaven, and letters, 1924-26, of David Proudfoot, Methil, to G. Allen Hutt* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1981), 65.

¹² See also Paul Malgrati, "Joe Corrie's Robert Burns," *Burns Chronicle* for 2020, 129 (2020 [November 2019]): 96-102.

This lyrical dream colours many of Corrie's mid-1920s poems, as instanced by "A Miners' Lover":

Here in the guts of the earth,
In my father's tomb,
In the forests of aeons past,
In the gas and the gloom;
Naked and blind with sweat
I strive and I strain,
Like a beast in the famine year,
Or a bloody Cain.

But, home, I will wash me clean,
And over the hill,
To the glen of the fair primrose
And the daffodil;
And there I will sing of my Love
With a tenderness
That only a god can feel—
Lord God, what a mess!¹³

Likewise, in "A Lazy Lout," Corrie praises the relief of idle hours, away from both the exhaustion of labour and the uproar of revolution:

Give me a summer day
And a chestnut tree
To shield the naked rays
Of the sun from me.

And let me lie down there
On a couch of grass,
With a window in the tree
Where white clouds pass.

That is the life for me,
The life for me!
A lazy lout?
Thanks to the powers that be.¹⁴

Closer to Paul Lafargue's idle socialism in *The Right to be Lazy* (1883) than to Lenin's warlike vanguardism in *What is to be Done?* (1902), these two 1926 poems shed light on the message of *In Time o' Strife*. As

¹³ Joe Corrie, *The Image o' God and Other Poems* (Glasgow: Forward Publishing, [1926]), 23. In his 2013 adaptation of *In Time o' Strife*, Graham McLaren used Corrie's updated version of this poem, from *The Image o' God* (London: Porpoise Press, 1937).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.61. On this poem, cf. Gavin Bowd, "A Lazy Lout': Joe Corrie and the Heroism of Labour," at: <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/joe-corrie/conferencepapers/a-lazy-lout-joe-corrie-and-the-heroism-of-labour/> [accessed on 8 February 2020].

explained by Jean Smith, in the last act of the play, a successful strike cannot rely on demonstrations of fierce, working-class manliness, imbued with competitive, dog-eat-dog instincts. Instead, strike action should aim to liberate workers from strife, freeing their senses from the pit's darkness, preserving their bodies from work accidents, and substituting capitalistic competition with inclusive solidarity.

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